



Apostle Islands National Lakeshore Implementing the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act

Federal lands and waters play a central role in providing recreational opportunities for American families. In 1970, Apostle Islands National Lakeshore became part of the National Park System, whose Congressionally-established mission is “to conserve the scenery, and the natural and historic objects and wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same ... as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

Fulfilling this mission requires that the National Park Service (NPS) provide and maintain visitor facilities and services and preserve natural and historic resources. Meeting the conservation challenge and the needs of park visitors by delivering quality recreation, emergency services, and heritage and wilderness opportunities requires an adequate and steady source of funding.

Most of the cost of recreation activities on federal lands is funded through Congressional appropriations. Like other businesses, the NPS must live within its means. In this era of flat budgets, the NPS has embarked on a major effort to reduce costs, increase efficiency, focus on core operations, and enhance partnership and volunteer opportunities at Apostle Islands. Despite these efforts, the quality and quantity of park services has eroded, while visitation has been steady or increasing.

Recreational user fees have been a part of the national parks since the early days, and over the years Congress has established a variety of fee programs to enhance park system revenues and target the funds for particular beneficial uses. To date, the only fees charged at Apostle Islands have been camping reservation fees and fees associated with muzzle loader hunting permits. Other fees such as overnight camping, use of docks, interpretive programs, lighthouse tours, boat launching, or emergency search and rescue services have never been charged here. Fees for many of these activities are common in most other national and state parks.

In 2004, Congress replaced previous fee directives with a new, comprehensive, and more uniform fee program for federal recreation areas. Under this new authority – the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) – the National Park Service has established procedures under which park managers are to identify new fee options. Entrance and user fees will be made more consistent across the National Park System and visitors will be able to purchase reasonably-priced annual passes for specific parks as well as for the entire national system. Park managers are required to communicate and engage with community members and stakeholders about the new fees and consider legitimate issues that are raised prior to submitting a formal proposal for agency review and approval.

By agency policy, 100% of the fee revenue collected at Apostle Islands will stay at Apostle Islands, and will be used for critical and highly visible projects which will benefit the public.

This new funding will supplement, not replace, appropriated revenues, and make a significant difference in the quality of services provided to visitors.

We expect to use the fee revenue to restore services that have eroded, improve the condition of park facilities and services, and reduce our maintenance backlog on such projects as:

- improved dock maintenance
- maintaining and enhancing campgrounds, trails, and picnic areas
- preservation of historic buildings and cultural landscapes
- habitat restoration directly related to wildlife-dependent recreation
- enhanced interpretive displays and tours
- enhanced availability for emergency response (e.g. search, rescue, first aid)

Recreational user permits for camping and interpretive programs will be available for purchase in Bayfield and at Little Sand Bay. Other permits for recreational use such as parking or overnight docking may be obtained at select mainland and island locations through self-serve collection stations. Some recreation user fees may be payable outside the park to maximize visitor convenience.

There are no plans to hire additional staff to enforce recreational user fees. Enforcement will be low-key, stressing education and compliance. Our hope is that we will earn the community's support through fairness and accountability for how the funds are spent.

Release of details regarding the NPS proposal for Apostle Islands was delayed in order to provide more opportunity for public involvement, and to assure we are consistent with evolving national guidance on fees across the National Park System. Park management has sought input from hundreds of people and met with many organized groups since March 2005 on the concept, authority, and need for new fees in the park and suggestions for alternative fee structures and options. This input has been invaluable as we crafted the various fee options.

Implementation Schedule:

March 3, 2006	NPS formally announces fee options and seeks public input
April 4, 2006	Public comment period ends
May 2006	Apostle Islands fee proposal submitted to NPS central office
Summer 2006	Fee proposal reviewed and finalized
Spring 2007	New fees implemented at Apostle Islands National Lakeshore